

Kerala's Operation Amrith: A Comprehensive Approach to Tackle Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and Safeguard Public Health

(Operation Amrith in Kerala fights antibiotic resistance, emphasizing regulation, public engagement, and global collaboration to safeguard health and ecosystems.)



(Source: GK Today)

In a groundbreaking move to safeguard public health and combat the escalating threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), the Kerala Drug Control Department has launched Operation Amrith (Antimicrobial Resistance Intervention For Total Health). This initiative is strategically designed to address the rampant overuse of antibiotics within the state, primarily by cracking down on over-the-counter (OTC) sales of antibiotics without a doctor's prescription.

Understanding Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR):

AMR is a critical global health issue, representing the ability of bacteria and microbes to resist the drugs intended to inhibit or kill them. Often described as a 'silent pandemic,' AMR was responsible for approximately 5 million deaths worldwide in 2019, with 1.3 million deaths directly attributed to this alarming phenomenon. The overuse and misuse of antibiotics contribute significantly to the development of AMR, necessitating urgent and coordinated efforts to address the issue.

The Role of Drug Controller:



(Source: Down to Earth)

The Drugs Controller of Kerala plays a pivotal role in optimizing antibiotic use by curbing OTC antibiotic sales. Pharmacies are now mandated to maintain detailed records of antibiotic sales, and prominently display posters stating 'antibiotics not sold without a doctor's prescription.' Strict actions will be taken against those who do not comply with these regulations, underlining the seriousness of the issue. The emphasis on regulatory measures recognizes the role of healthcare providers in ensuring responsible antibiotic use and curbing the spread of AMR.

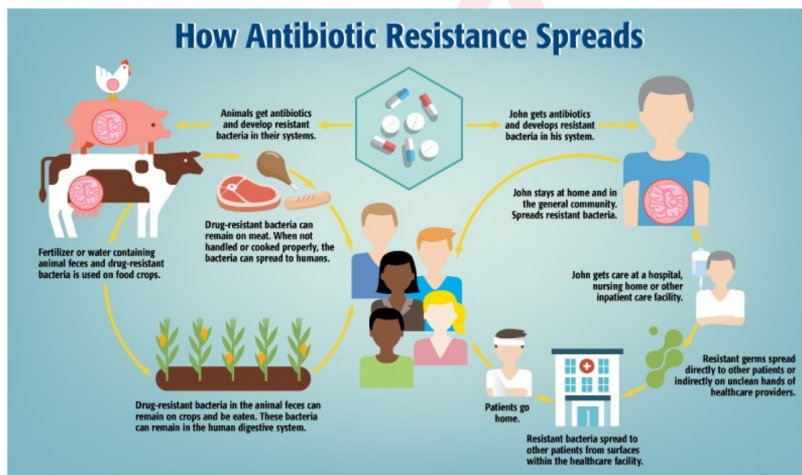
Public Participation in Operation Amrith:

Recognizing the significance of public involvement, the Drug Control Department encourages individuals to actively participate in reporting pharmacies engaging in the sale of antibiotics without proper prescriptions. A toll-free number has been provided for lodging complaints, which are then transferred to the zonal office for verification and immediate action. This collaborative effort seeks to empower the public as key stakeholders in the fight against AMR, fostering a sense of responsibility and awareness within the community.

Alignment with Kerala's State Action Plan:

Operation Amrith seamlessly integrates with Kerala's Antimicrobial Resistance Strategic Action Plan (KARSAP) and its antibiotic literacy initiative. As the first Indian state with a state action plan on AMR aligned with the national plan, Kerala has initiated the Antibiotic Literate Kerala Campaign to raise awareness about AMR and promote responsible antibiotic use. This alignment reflects a holistic and forward-thinking approach in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by AMR. The educational campaigns and initiatives under the state action plan play a crucial role in changing public behavior and attitudes towards antibiotic use.

Commitment to Phase Out OTC Antibiotic Sales:



(Source: Insight IAS)

The health department in Kerala has made a resolute commitment to completely phase out OTC antibiotic sales without proper prescriptions. Stringent actions will be taken against pharmacists who violate these regulations, demonstrating the state's determination to curtail the misuse of antibiotics and instill responsible practices within the pharmaceutical sector. This commitment is not only a regulatory measure but also a pledge to prioritize public health over economic interests, setting a precedent for other regions to follow.

Drug Take-Back Programme - PROUD:

In its pursuit of a sustainable solution, Kerala has implemented the Programme on Removal of Unused Drugs (PROUD) to ensure the proper disposal of unused antibiotics. Launched in 2019 in Thiruvananthapuram district, this drug take-

back program aims not only to prevent environmental contamination but also to mitigate the further development of antibiotic resistance, emphasizing the state's commitment to environmental stewardship. The PROUD initiative acknowledges the interconnectedness of human and environmental health in the context of AMR, providing a model for responsible drug disposal.

Global Health and Economic Impact of AMR:

The global ramifications of AMR are severe, with the World Bank estimating in 2017 that annual healthcare costs could reach a staggering \$1.2 trillion by 2050 under a high AMR impact scenario. Additionally, the world could witness a 3.8% annual loss in GDP, resulting in up to 10 million deaths each year, predominantly in Asia and Africa. Kerala's proactive measures contribute significantly to the global fight against the economic and health impacts of AMR, positioning the state as a trailblazer in this critical arena. The interconnectedness of global health and the economic impact of AMR underscore the importance of regional initiatives like Operation Amrith in the broader context of international cooperation.

Kerala's Efforts on AMR Surveillance:



(Source: News9live)

In addition to Operation Amrith, Kerala has undertaken substantial efforts in AMR surveillance. The state launched the Kerala Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance Network (KARS-NET) for human surveillance in 2018-19. Furthermore, in August 2023, the Kerala State Pollution Control Board inaugurated an AMR lab dedicated to environmental surveillance. This comprehensive approach underscores Kerala's commitment to staying ahead in the battle against AMR by proactively monitoring and addressing both human and environmental aspects. The establishment of specialized laboratories for AMR surveillance reflects the state's commitment to scientific research and data-driven decision-making.

Public Awareness Initiatives:

To bolster public awareness, Kerala has implemented extensive awareness initiatives under the Antibiotic Literate Kerala Campaign. Educational programs, workshops, and community outreach efforts have been instrumental in disseminating information about responsible antibiotic use, fostering a sense of responsibility among both healthcare providers and the general public.



Investment in Research and Innovation:

Kerala has demonstrated a commitment to addressing AMR through research and innovation. By inaugurating the AMR lab for environmental surveillance in 2023, the state has shown a proactive stance in understanding the dynamics of AMR beyond human health. This investment in research contributes to the global knowledge base on AMR, potentially leading to innovative solutions and strategies in the future.

Collaboration with International Organizations:

Recognizing the global nature of AMR, Kerala has actively sought collaboration with international organizations working on AMR-related issues. By participating in global networks and sharing insights, Kerala contributes to a collective effort to combat AMR on an international scale. Such collaborations can facilitate the exchange of best practices and access to resources that strengthen the state's ability to address AMR comprehensively.

Operation Amrith stands as a commendable and indispensable initiative by the Kerala Drug Control Department, showcasing the state's dedication to safeguarding public health and leading the charge against the escalating threat of antimicrobial resistance. The multifaceted approach, encompassing regulatory measures, public participation, and environmental surveillance, not only reflects the state's commitment but also sets a noteworthy example for other regions globally to follow in the fight against the silent pandemic of antimicrobial resistance. As Kerala continues to implement and strengthen these strategies, it not only addresses a local concern but also contributes significantly to the global effort to combat AMR and ensure a healthier future for generations to come. The state's focus on public awareness, research, innovation, and international collaboration positions it as a leader in the global fight against AMR, demonstrating a commitment to holistic and sustainable solutions in the face of this critical health challenge.

